

# SETTING THE CAPTIVES

# FREE

## CC Lancaster, Pennsylvania

**‘Remember the prisoners’—small but powerful ministry in Lancaster County Prison bears much fruit.**

Story by Bob Makin  
Photos by Loren Heimle

*Remember the prisoners as if chained with them ... since you yourselves are in the body also.* Hebrews 13:3

In the rolling, green hills of Pennsylvania Amish country, Pastor Jim Friedman of Calvary Chapel Lancaster has been working in a field tougher than most—the county prison. For many years, Jim taught for one of the CC Philadelphia home studies. Six years ago, he and his wife, Connie, sold his art gallery/framing business and their home and moved to Lancaster to share God’s Word.

Teaching God’s Word verse by verse every week for the past five years at Lancaster County Prison, he has seen several criminal offenders give their lives to Christ and grow in their desire to serve Him. Some have spent hours in their cells memorizing Scripture or sharing God’s Word with other inmates.

On a September afternoon, more than 30 men gathered around Jim to hear him teach from the Book of Malachi. They listened intently to Jim’s message amidst interruptions



*An Amish farmer plows with horses in Lancaster, PA.*

from a nearby indoor basketball game and the prison’s loudspeaker. Many eagerly said “amen” or offered their own personal testimonies in agreement.

Jim shared, “God loves you, but you’ve got to take that to heart. He wants you to get real with Him.”

***“If you will not hear, and if you will not take it to heart, to give glory to***

Photo by Robert Palko

*My name,” says the LORD of hosts, “I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take it to heart.”*

Malachi 2:2

“What should be the object of our minds?” Jim asked. “To bring glory to Jesus.” He explained: “This is the Old Testament, the old covenant. God’s curses and blessings were based on what the people did. We [who are believers] are judged by what Jesus did on the cross for us. So when he says, ‘I will send a curse upon you,’ He’s not talking to you as a believer because the curse already has been paid for by the blood of Christ.”

To men who have been charged and found guilty in the world’s system, “forgiven” seemed to have a powerful ring. Jim continued to teach about God’s covenant of “life and peace” (Malachi 2:5) for those who reverently fear Him. “Do you remember what Proverbs 1:7 says?” he asked.

**“Many [visitors] ... give wonderful salvation messages week after week. Some ... guys ‘get saved’ 20 or 30 times. ... What is really needed is discipleship and training in the truth of His Word.”**

Pastor Jim Friedman



*The Norman-style prison built in 1851*

Several men quoted from memory: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” Later, another man quoted Micah 6:8.

The 62-year-old pastor smiled. “I’m so proud of you guys. Why? Because that’s the Word of God. You can memorize it, internalize it any time you want. You can go back to your cell, get a Bible, read the 23rd Psalm, and memorize it.” The discussion turned toward the importance of knowing God’s Word.

An inmate named Anthony Floyd shared, “We can’t fight the devil other than with the Word. That’s why Jesus said, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ (Matthew 4:4a). If you don’t know the Word, you can’t speak the Word.”

“Amen,” a couple of the prisoners responded.

“If you don’t find a church where the Word of God is being preached, you’re nowhere,” Jim added. “The Word of God convicts us.”

### Key to Growth: Discipleship

Sadly, the pastor has watched several men who seemed to know the Lord return to the prison as repeat offenders. “It’s hard to help these guys when they get out,” Jim said, “because if you give them money, they’ll buy drugs. If you give them food, they’ll sell it for drugs. But if you can give them the Gospel, maybe they’ll turn to Jesus and turn away from the street.” Many who turned to Christ in jail are still walking with Him, Jim added.

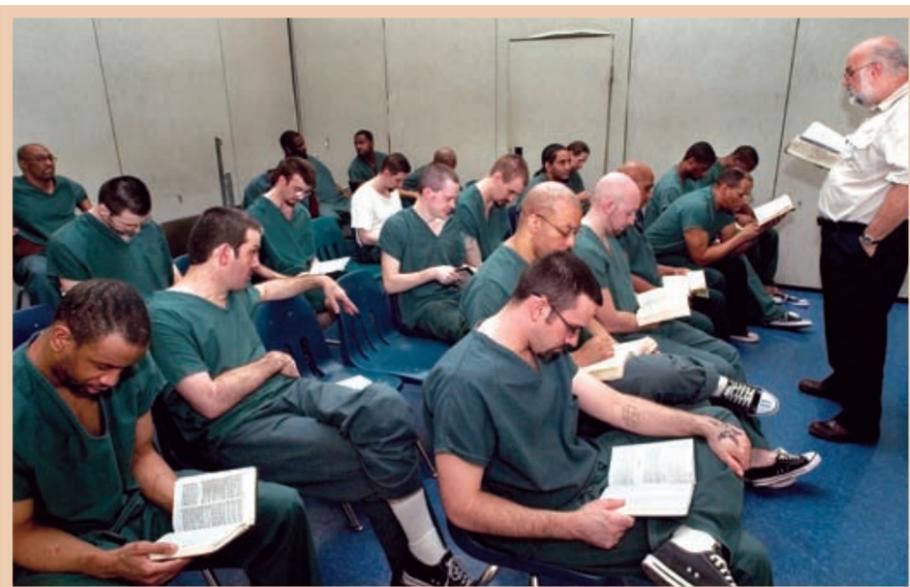
“It is the truth that truly sets men free,” he emphasized. “The prisoners are street-smart: They know how to con you and know when they are being conned,” Jim explained. “Hearing the truth of God’s Word taught with the genuine love of Jesus is what changes their hearts. They know when they are hearing the truth, which is what makes prison ministry so attractive.”

He encourages other Calvary Chapels to reach out to their local correctional institutions with regular teaching and discipleship. “Many churches and rescue missions come into prisons and give wonderful salvation messages week after week,” he continued. “Some of these guys ‘get saved’ 20 or 30 times. However, what is really needed is discipleship and training in the truth of His Word, man by man. Servants need to be prepared for years of investment before seeing a return.”

### Ripple Effects

Another believer from CC Lancaster, Jim Van Fossen, offers individual counseling for several inmates who regularly attend Bible study. “I get to see the power of God’s Word touch their hearts. The guys often remark that questions they had were answered in the verses we looked at. Sometimes the tears flow as God speaks to their hearts.”

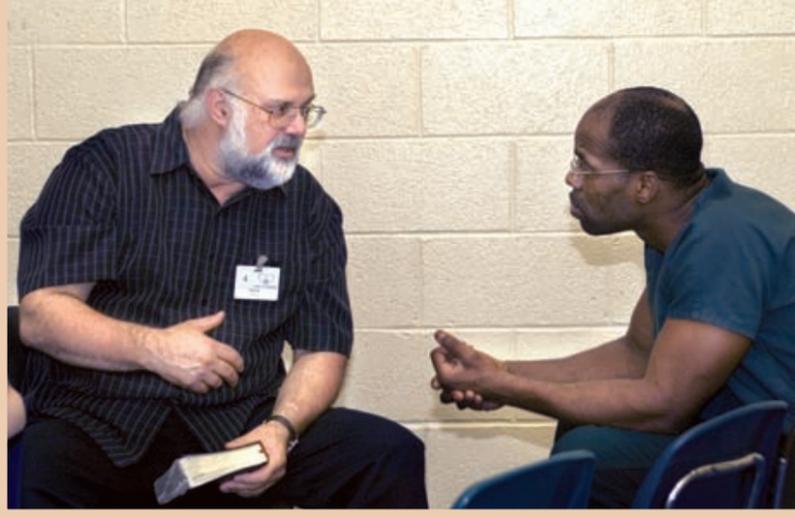
The counselor added, “When I visit with them over time, I see growth. It is obvious the Holy Spirit is working in their lives. Their priorities change from getting out of prison ... to being used by God for the rest of their lives. Typically, there is also an obvious change in their attitudes ... realizing that God has them right where He wants them. Some are even content to be [in prison]—to



*At the weekly Bible study, 20-plus inmates read along as Pastor Jim Friedman of CC Lancaster, PA, teaches the Word.*



*Pastor Jim, center, prays with inmates during Bible study at Lancaster County Prison. Inmates share prayer concerns each week.*



*Jim shares a personal application with Winston Walker, right.*

be used by God while they are there, to take the time ... to get to know God and His will for their lives.”

Jim Van Fossen counseled one prisoner named Scott for two years. Very much a loner and recluse, Scott often spent time alone studying his Bible and memorizing Scripture. Jim challenged him to share his growing knowledge of the Bible with other

prisoners. “The next time I saw Scott, he and his friend had a regular Bible study going with a couple other guys,” Jim said. “[Six weeks later,] he told me how the Bible study had grown, and multiple men on their block had been saved.”

**First Step: Brokenness**

Inmates Ramone Medina, Anthony Floyd, and Dennis Slack said they felt God put

them in prison to break and humble them so that they might completely rely on Him and be fully aware of His purpose for their lives. They were convicted for crimes by the justice system but now are convicted by the Word of God.

Having watched them grow in God’s Word during their incarceration, Pastor Jim said, “I would love for them to come to my church when they get out.”

Ramone has grown considerably in his faith through the Bible studies. “I wish there were 30 Jims in here,” said Ramone. Waiting for his parole date to be determined, Ramone said, “I have to renew my faith in here every day ... but I’ve died to that. I’ve been broken. I know God has a plan, and He knows what He’s doing. He’s building me up. At the same time, He’s humbling me.”

Wanting to see the prisoners succeed upon their release, Jim talks straight to them. During Bible study, he said, “The road to hell is paved with sorry. You have to be more than sorry. You have to repent.”



*Winston, left, shares about his understanding of the Bible study with Shawn Knotwell, center, and Steve Murphy, right.*



*Jim, center, joins in prayer with John Campbell, left, and Mike Lloyd as inmates pray for each other in small groups.*

Even though he knows God has forgiven him, Dennis Slack knows that he will have a difficult time being a witness for God on the outside because of his past offenses. “I don’t know what tomorrow will bring, but I know I want to have a relationship with God. We’ll see what He has in store. I know doors will be shut, but God will open them.”

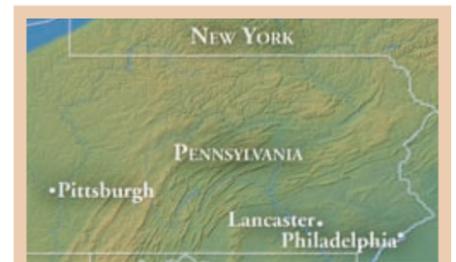
**Still Walking**

Pastor Jim praises God for many who have continued to walk with Christ after their release—men such as Ron Bender, who was released in 2003, has remained in the Word, and occasionally visits CC Lancaster with

his wife. “I love that Pastor Jim came in and spent time with us out of love to teach us in a way that we could understand the Bible and give us a chance to better ourselves,” Ron said. “I understand the Bible better because of that verse-by-verse teaching. It really ... laid a foundation.”

Jim said he hopes there will be a ministry to the women’s prison someday. ↻

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*Lancaster is 78 miles northwest of the city of Philadelphia.*

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